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JOHN MILTON

AND

HIS MINOR POEMS

AND

THEIR INFLUENCE

MARY STEWART KENNEDY



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JOHN MILTON

AND HIS

MINOR POEMS

*Their Influence on the XVII, XVIII,
and XIX Centuries
in England.*

BY
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PART ONE

L'ALLEGRO, IL PENSEROSO,
COMUS, ARCADES, LYCIDAS.

PART TWO

DRYDEN, POPE.

PART THREE

LATER WRITERS OF XVIII CENTURY
AND
SOME OF XIX CENTURY.

PREFACE

SUCH students as desire further information on the topics treated herein, will find a list of books and authors at the end of the volume.

This little book would have appeared much earlier but for wars and rumors of wars.

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New York City, September 1915.

PART I.

AFTER a sojourn of seven years within the walls of his Alma Mater, Christ's College, Cambridge, John Milton went to reside in his father's house, at Horton in Buckhamshire, near Windsor. He had obtained two degrees from his college and had established a reputation for great scholarship. Science and mathematics were not far advanced in his time, so he had pursued the classics with delight and profit. In addition to the required Greek and Latin, he had perfected himself in Hebrew, because his own and his father's early idea was, that he should become a clergyman of the Episcopal Church. But his later views and desires, had led him to a life of literary activity, and therefore, he had made much progress in French—the language of courts—and in Italian—the tongue of the most famous writers of his day.

He had been born in Bread Street, Cheapside, London, in 1608. His father, (also John Milton), son of Richard Milton, yeoman, of Oxfordshire, had been obliged to leave the ancestral home on account of a disagreement with his parents on the score of religion. The parents were of the ancient Roman Catholic faith, and they could not brook the change which their son (John, Senior), made to the newer form—Episcopalianism.

John, (Senior,) settled in London, and in time se-

cured a competence and a reputation as a scrivener—a sort of lawyer—like a notary public. He appears to have been a man of considerable education for the time. We learn that he belonged to reading clubs, and musical societies. He was a performer, of some ability, on some musical instruments, and he composed the scores for several part pieces, which were performed by the musical societies. He drew around him men of intelligence and learning, in the literary and musical world of his circle. He was intensely anxious about the education of his boy John. The latter has referred many times to the father's solicitude in the matter.

The region of Cheapside, was in that day, almost a country village—separated by fields and woods from the nucleus of London proper.

The father, John Milton, inherited the love of country life, which must necessarily have been his, as the descendant of a long line of sturdy English yeomen.

The mother, Sarah Jeffreys, came of a similar family, originally from Essex.

The boy, (John the poet), had the woods and fields about his home for his ranging ground in his leisure hours, until the age of seventeen, and from that time until his graduation, the vicinity of the college, on the banks of the Cam, furnished its scenery for his observation. Hence it is no wonder that in his leisurely composition at Horton—to which the family had removed—we find rural scenes depicted, with the pen of one accustomed to observe nature, one who loved that which he described.

In *L'Allegro*, the pleasures of the cheerful man are set forth, as of one determined to obtain from life all the innocent enjoyment she had to offer.

To Melancholy he virtually says "Aroint thee, witch, we'll none of thee." The unhappy pedigree of Melancholy is set forth,—

"Born in darkest cave forlorn." The nymph of Mirth is invoked, and bid to bring with her all cheerful attributes, and among others,

"Sport, that wrinkled care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides,"—

but especially,


"The mountain Nymph, sweet Liberty,"
and he entreats permission to be of the charming company.

Then follows the list of country sounds and sights which they would all enjoy, ending with the enumeration of certain rural occupations, pleasures, and superstitions.

After this, city enjoyments are recalled, and the knightly tournament, and the bright-eyed dames who adorn it, are not forgotten. And lastly, the theatre, if

"Johnson's learned sock be on,—
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood notes wild."

Then follow certain lines which prove that his father's son was a true musician, and well he understood the movement of musical composition.



“Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse:
Such as the meeting soul may pierce,
In notes with many a winding bout,
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony.”

He had many “eating cares” in his later life, and his consolation was always his organ, or some other sweet instrument.

How close, he here considers, the union should be between music and poetry. Apollo’s emblem was the lyre, indicating the inseparable nature of music and poetry.

How vividly he portrays the voice of the singer, in pursuing the “runs” of a musical composition. We can almost hear the voice singing.

This delightful passage is really not the keynote of *L’Allegro*.

The poem is written to set forth the charms which the natural world of field, dale, mountain, and flood, have for the healthy mind that observes them. Such person rises betimes, as did Chaucer of old, and cheerful thoughts and companions attend him. Melancholy and Sorrow flee from before him. The soaring lark, the noisy cock, the hounds and horns, the rising sun, the plowman, the milkmaid, the mower, the shepherd, the sheep—these belongings of daily life, gave him pleasure to observe. Then, too, the general view of the landscape with its lights

and shades, the clouds above, the daisies in the grassy meads, the little streams, the wide rivers, all affect him pleasantly. Later, the noonday laborers with their earnest industry, the holiday enjoyments of the peasantry, and their little harmless superstitions, all receive attention.

This simple life he portrays through a whole day. When the day ends he turns to record the pleasures of city life, more briefly, but not less effectively.

The tournament, the marriage feast, the "masque and antique pageantry,"

"Such sights as youthful poets dream,
On summer eve, by haunted stream,"—

and such a city day ends with a visit to the "well-trod stage," where the best plays are given.

This poem is written in octo-syllabic lines, mainly in trochaic feet, to show the light tripping quality of the rhythm, appropriate to the cheerful theme. It describes nature as nature would appeal to, and affect, a young and joyous mind. Its tone is pure, healthy, sane, the work of one who loved, who sympathized with, who appreciated, and who was happily affected by natural objects.

There was another side to the poet's nature besides the merely objective.

He composed a companion piece —*Il Penseroso*—✓
the pensive man, the thoughtful man, the man of inward, subjective enjoyment. It may be that his Puritan scruples made him feel that *L'Allegro* was too lively, too frivolous, and he wished to justify himself to himself, (or to any possible later readers, for these poems did not see the light of publication

for several years), by singing of the other side of his thoughts.

This second poem, perhaps, much better expressed the real nature of the writer, with his likes and dislikes in regard to those matters which would be of more lasting interest to his refined and scholarly temperament.

The contrast between the opening invocations of these companion poems is quite marked. The introduction in each case is filled with much of classical allusion. The metaphors and personifications are very numerous. We may say, that the poems, as wholes, have a romantic tendency. The introductions are highly classic.

L'Allegro says,
"Hence loathed Melancholy"
but in *Il Penseroso*, we find,
"Hence vain deluding Joys,"
and later,
"Hail divinest Melancholy,"
and farther on,
"Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure, etc."

Il Penseroso is a poem of intellectual joys, as *L'Allegro* is one of purely sensuous delights. It is pitched in a higher key, and carried on in a finer strain. —

Melancholy's "looks commercing with the skies," and her "rapt soul sitting" in her "eyes," tell of loftier things than those of mirth that was adjured to "Trip it on the light fantastic toe."

More of literature, more of philosophy, until at last instead of "Lydian airs," "the full-voiced choir below" would "dissolve" him "into ecstasies," and "bring all heaven before" his "eyes." And, finally, "old experience" would "lead him to prophetic strain."

L'Allegro, was written about the pleasures of the day; *Il Penseroso* is about the occupations of a thoughtful man in the calm night. The two poems cover the period of the twenty-four hours. Walking here in the darkness of evening, to hear if the night-ingale will deign to sing a song,

"Soothing the rugged brow of night," the poet utters a charming invocation to the pleasing songstress.

"Sweet bird that shun'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy,
Thee, chantress, oft the woods among,
I woo, to hear thy evensong."

And, "missing" what he sought, "the wandering moon" attracts his gaze, and then, in the distance, the curfew peals out, lonely and sad, across the remote lake.

When "the air will not permit," in a quiet and "removed place," he passes his time—his light "the gleaming embers," his lonely "contemplation" disturbed only by "the cricket on the hearth," or the watchman calling the hours without.

His chief delight, "at midnight hour," is to "study in some lonely tower," astronomy—"to outwatch the Bear"—or meditate on philosophy—

“Inspire
The Spirit of Plato, to unfold
What worlds, or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind, that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.”

And then, he bewails the loss of the great poets departed from this life, Musaeus, Orpheus, Chaucer, Spenser, Tasso, Ariosto.

“More is meant than meets the ear,” in Milton as well as in Spenser.

All night long he would be engaged in contemplation, or study.

“Till civil-suited Morn appears,” and then, “when the Sun” would “begin to fling, his flowing beams,” he would seek to find “arched walks of twilight groves,” to be hidden “from day’s garish eye,” when the hum of the bee and the drowsy murmur of the waters, would

“Entice the dewy feathered sleep.”

But ever and ever, this was his desire:

“But let my due feet never fail,

To walk the studious cloisters pale,

And love the high embowered roof,

With antique pillars, massy, proof,

And storied windows richly dight,

Casting a dim religious light.

There let the pealing organ blow,

To the full voiced choir below,

In service high, and anthems clear,

As may with sweetness through mine ear,

Dissolve me into ecstacies,

And bring all heaven before mine eyes.”

Thus study—contemplation—heavenly music—were to be the occupations of the thoughtful man, in contradistinction to the active outdoor life of the cheerful one—the second supplementing the first—two halves of one whole.

These lyrics were composed in 1632-33, when young Milton was first at home from college, after obtaining his master's degree.

In all the Minor Poems, we find a love of nature, and also an aptness in describing natural scenery—a readiness to note its salient points. The human beings connected therewith, and even the lower animals were properly depicted—often with merely a few striking touches. He used pleasing imagery. He was much addicted to iambic and trochaic measures—and he employed blank verse wherever possible.

In *Il Penseroso*, we are called upon to note, that because the subject is more “thoughtful” the measure is mainly iambic—which gives dignity. It is better in keeping with the stately character of the “pensive nun”—with the solemn contemplation of lofty subjects—with deep meditation on the immortality of the soul, and on the ennobling qualities of “heavenly music.”

Both poems are filled with figurative language, especially personifications. Classical lore is everywhere apparent.

Arcades and *Comus* are in imitation of Greek odes, though in the form of the one act Elizabethian plays called masques. Each is a pastoral drama—

and here again Milton's predilection for country sights and sounds is to be observed.

Let us begin with *Comus*. When we read these words we cannot give too high praise to the sentiments.

"He that has light within his own clear breast,
May sit in the center and enjoy bright day;
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts,
Benighted walks under the mid-day sun:
Himself in his own dungeon."

Again,

"How charming is divine Philosophy;
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns."

This whole poem is Milton himself, set forth on the side of purity, order, and law. The moral is given in the concluding words of the attendant good spirit, embodying the author's inmost beliefs.

"Mortals that would follow me,
Love virtue: she alone is free,
She can teach ye how to climb,
Higher than the sphery chime.
Or, if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her."

In regard to *Comus* there is but one opinion. In its lofty ideals, it is unsurpassed. As to the class of readers he sought, those whose favor he desired, we may quote the writer's own lines, put into the mouth of the "attendant spirit:"

"Yet some there be that by due steps aspire,
To lay their just hands on that golden key
That opes the palace of eternity.
To such my errand is."

This poem is the apotheosis of virtue.

The *Faustus* of Marlow sought earthly, sensual pleasure—and his *Tamburlaine*, universal empire. *Comus* is based upon another idea;

"the crown that Virtue gives

After this mortal change to her true servants."

The song to Echo, by the lady lost in the forest, attracts by its melody of diction, and its charming, ideal description.

"Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph that liv'st unseen,
Within thy airy shell,
By slow Meander's margent green,
And the violet embroidered vale,
When the love-lorn nightingale,
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well,
Can'st thou not tell me of a gentle pair,
That liketh thy Narcissus are?
Or, if thou have
Hid them in some flowerly cave,
Tell me but where,
Sweet queen of parley, daughter of the sphere;
So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all Heaven's
harmonies."

The beautiful imagery, in the address to the water nymph, asking aid for the distressed lady held in the power of the evil enchanter, is also very attractive.

"Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting,
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave
In twisted braids of lilies knitting,
The loose train of thy amber dropping hair:
Listen for dear honor's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save."

Sabrina replies,

"By the rushy fringed bank,
Where grow the willow and osier dank,
My sliding chariot stays,
Thick set with agate, and the azure sheen,
Of turquoise blue, and emerald green,
That in the channel stays:
Whilst from off the waters fleet,
Thus I set my printless feet,
O'er the cowslip's velvet head
That bends not as I tread;
Gentle swain, at thy request
I am here."

This little poem contains 1023 lines, and was founded on a simple incident about three young children. A little girl and her two older brothers strayed into the woods of their father's demesne, and were unable to find their way home, because of approaching darkness. A shepherd in their father's employ, found the little wanderers, and escorted them home, before their absence was discovered.

Their father, Earl of Bridgewater, was later appointed by King Charles, to some high office in Wales. His friends and neighbors decided upon

giving him a farewell entertainment. A masque was proposed as part of the programme. To Henry Lawes, for his skill in such matters, was entrusted the charge of the necessary music. He induced John Milton, who knew the family, to furnish the words. Milton used the above incident as a foundation for his narrative.

But—the poet represented the young Egertons as fully grown, lost in a forest inhabited by an evil spirit, unknown to classic antiquity, (namely Comus, son of Bacchus and Circe, a construction of Milton's imagination,) possessed of the bad qualities of both the parents. Comus always had a riotous crew of followers.

Night came on, and the young girl separated by darkness from her brothers, is confronted by Comus, who assailed her by his violence, his enchantments, his allurements. Her innate purity enabled her to resist all temptations, and she was finally rescued by the intervention of a good spirit specially sent by Heaven to save such as she.

Hence Milton's opportunity to utter his views on purity of thought, on life, and soul. He made golden use of the chance and for his success he has won the highest encomiums.

This poem, with such a lofty purpose, required the dignified measure of iambic pentameter lines, and he has made a fine arrangement. *Comus* is partly pastoral, because of its necessary setting. The lovely lyrics interspersed, serve to give sufficient variety to its severe tone.

The author gives due attention to poor humanity.

The peasant's "thatched hut," with "wicker hole for a window," the "swinked hedger"—weary soul—the "long leveled rule of streaming light," from the feeble taper, and other similar expressions, show that poverty and wretchedness were not unobserved by the writer.

The allusions to natural scenery and natural occurrences, prove, as in other poems, how his mind was receptive to the world's daily panorama. "The gilded car of day," "his glowing axle," "teeming flocks," "granges full," "green mantling vine," "bosky bourn," "low roosted lark," "chill dew," "rude burs and thistles," and many other expressions show his observing powers.

His many figurative forms continue; as, for example, "some cold bank her bolster," "low but loyal cottage," "thou shalt be our star," "disinherit chaos," "coutinous echo," "to answer from her mossy couch," "pure-eyed Faith," "champion Conscience," "white-handed Hope," "to quench the drought of Phoebus"—and others without number.

Arcades is a mere fragment compared to *Comus*. No evil genius is here introduced, but some of the lines and ideas bear a wonderful resemblance to parts of *Comus*, and the whole is a little pastoral of a delightful character, and in honor of the birthday of a very old and very charming lady. The celebration was a very quiet one, by her children and grandchildren, to sing her praises.

Here is a trifle of lyric writing:

"O'er the smooth enameled green,

Where no print of step hath been
Follow as I sing,
And touch the warbled string:
Under shady roof
Of branching elms, star proof,
Follow me;
I will bring you where she sits,
Clad in splendor, as befits
Her dignity.
Such a rural queen,
All Arcadia hath not seen."

The last important poem of the happy period of the six years Milton spent at Horton, after his graduation, was *Lycidas*. In it the poet portrays the loss of a college friend. This young man, Edward King, was drowned in crossing the Irish Sea, to his home in Dublin, August 1637. The vessel was unseaworthy, and in calm weather it suddenly sank out of sight, no person escaping, though other vessels were near.

King was amiable, scholarly, faithful, a priest of the Episcopal Church, son of the Sir John King who was Secretary for Ireland under Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I. Milton here laments for his friend, calling him *Lycidas*—a Greek shepherd.

He sets forth the rare virtues of the departed one, and calls upon Nymphs and Muses to tell why the untoward event occurred. Later, he launches out into invectives against many false and unworthy pastors who had brought evil into the Church, through desire of worldly gain.

“Such as, for their bellie’s sake,
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold.”
Then

“The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.”

These words Milton puts into the mouth of “the Pilot of the Galilean lake,” who came to mourn the loss of this faithful worker in the fold, and to threaten condign and speedy punishment to the negligent and careless.

When Nymphs, Muses, heathen deities, and Christian Apostles had paid their tributes of sorrow, the poem takes on a jubilant tone, because,
“Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of Him who walked
the waves.”

At the beginning of this elegy is an invocation to the laurels, myrtles, and ivy to render up their leaves for a wreath.

“For Lycidas is dead, young Lycidas,
And hath not left his peer.”

Thus at the very outset there is a pastoral flavor, which is observable to the very end. Hence we may call it a pastoral elegy. *Comus* was a pastoral drama.

Comus began in the woods; the overshadowing gloom of the trees has a marked effect: the story is continued in the woods. Rural allusions and rural occupations are some of the themes touched upon by the brothers in talking together—by *Comus* in conversing with the young girl—by the good spirit—and by *Sabrina*. We breathe the health and beauty of the woods.

In *Lycidas*, the living and grieving friend mourns in pitiful terms for his companion of the hillside, of the noonday heat, of the musical pleasures of the flute. His lamentations excite the commiseration of the rural deities, who all alike deny complicity in bringing about the death of *Lycidas*.

Next Milton rises to a heat of passion, almost unexpected in him, against false shepherds. Then he cools down, and grieves in exquisite lines, in a tender and gentle pastoral fashion:

"Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers lie
In shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes
That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk rose and the well attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffodillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureate hearse where *Lycid* lies."

Towards the close of the poem the mourning friend seems to find consolation in such thoughts as these:

"Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For *Lycidas*, your sorrow is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor;

So sinks the day star in the ocean bed,
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore,
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky."

This idea of return, or resurrection—resurgam—gives added luster. After further brief monologue the poem closes thus:

"Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,
While the still morn went out with sandals gray:
He touched the tender stops of various quills,
With eager thought, warbled his Doric lay;
And now the sun has stretched out all the hills,
And now was dropped into the western bay.
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:
Tomorrow, to fresh woods and pastures new."

The gentle friend had mourned for his lost companion and been comforted, and so he would go "to fresh woods and pastures new," and sing a new song on the morrow.

Milton shortly went to Italy, but remained only fifteen months, being recalled home by what he thought his duty to his country—civil war was looming up. He was nearly thirty-two years old,—years filled with ease, competence, study, delight—but these had fled, and youth had ended. Civil troubles arose, domestic trials came upon him, political trials, physical evils, pecuniary difficulties, and danger, blindness, death followed in turn. Hardly any man had a life so markedly divided—thirty-two years of everything desirable—then thirty-five years of trials and unhappiness—some of which were his own fault.

In the latter part of his life he wrote poems considered greater than those we mention—poems on themes more lofty, subjects more ambitious, more difficult—but nothing sweeter, purer or better than his “Minor Poems.” One competent critic says “Had he never written anything but these he would stand in the front rank of English poets.” Their influence succeeded, in time, in mitigating the crudity and the coarseness of the other writers of the XVII and XVIII centuries, and in beginning a new era. From this elegy sprang two noble poems, Shelley’s “*Adonais*” for Keats, and later, Tennyson’s “*In Memoriam*” for his friend Hallam.

PART II

IF we desire to understand the effect of Milton's poems upon the XVIII century, and why he did not produce greater results in his own—the XVII century—we must look into history. History and literature ever go hand in hand, with causal relations between them.

We can arrange the dates of the three foremost consecutive poets of the period, thus:

Milton	Dryden	Pope
1608-1674	1631-1700	1688-1744

Their times thus overlap, each one appearing on the scene before the preceding one has left it.

This was a space of 136 years, a period of marked changes in English history. Hence literature had varying fortunes.

In James First's era, some of the greatest voices of Elizabeth's day still lingered. In Charles First's time came Milton with his *Minor Poems*. Then civil strife stilled his poetic voice, and he became engaged with political pamphlets, until after 1660, when he produced his great epics, for an unappreciative audience. Of *Paradise Lost*, Waller, a court poet, wrote—"The old, blind poet has written a new book. If its length be not its merit, it hath no other."

The kind of literature that the followers of Charles Second could admire, was not the sort that

Milton could furnish. What did they like? They professed to believe in the divineness of Kings, so they followed the tastes of their sovereign Lord, the King. By his bad example, evil was pronounced good, and it was eagerly sought and pursued, as desirable.

Corruption showed its chief effect on comic drama, but everywhere, in prose and poetry, do we find the blighting trail of the serpent.

In such times, and to such persons, poems about holiness, or truth, or purity, would be incomprehensible,—and poems on the beauties of country scenes, or the delights of study, or on the joys of faithful friendship,—would be written in a dead language. These things were “too high,” they “could not attain to them.”

The most able poet of this time was John Dryden, born (of noble families on both sides of his ancestral line,) at Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, 1631. He was educated at Westminster School, and then at Trinity College, Cambridge, from which he was graduated in 1650. His parents and people were Puritans.

His poetry illustrates remarkably the history of his age. When Puritanism and Cromwell were in power, he was of that party, in affiliation, and in expressed thoughts. When the licentiousness of the Restoration prevailed, his comic dramas—he wrote twenty-two plays—rivalled those of Wycherley, Congreve, Farquahar, and Van Brugh, in looseness of morals, and obscenity of language—but they were more cleverly written. When Jeremy Collier, a non-

juring clergyman, moved to indignation by the vileness of the stage, protested in his work "Against the Immorality of the Stage," he mentioned Dryden with others, by name, as having corrupted the morals of the nation—and Dryden, at the time, held the position of Poet Laureate.

Dryden's forte was satire. It was an age of brutal frankness of speech, and in *Absalom and Achitophel*, in *The Medal*, and in *MacFlecknoe*, we find the most biting sarcasm, joined to the plainest expressions of opinion, in regard to real physical, or supposed mental defects, of the persons so unfortunate as to have fallen under the cruel words of his pen.

He wrote didactic poetry—*Religio Laici*, and *The Hind and the Panther*, respectively lauding the Episcopal or the Catholic faith, according to his changes in religious forms.

He translated Theocritus, Homer, Lucretius, Horace, Virgil, Juvenal, Persius. He did these translations so well that his readers were convinced that he could have surpassed the classic writers in the particular kind of work for which each was noted. He wrote songs, odes, elegies,—and, strange to say—he produced two hymns, filled with such religious, fervor, seemingly genuine, that—John Milton, himself, could not have surpassed them. He had such a varied power over poetic rhymed composition, that his admirers at the literary club—in Will's Coffee House—called him "Glorious John"—but his influence on morals was baleful.

His verse shows a great contrast in youth and age, in regard to religious expressions. He undoubt-

edly aided in improving the English prose methods, then in vogue—though he harmed morals.

That he had true poetic fire cannot be disputed. If we desire to consider, the sway, the power, the control he had over words, rhythm, melody, here is a strong stanza from the Ode, Alexander's Feast.

“Now strike the golden lyre again
A louder yet, and yet a louder strain;
Break his bands of sleep asunder,
And rouse him like a rattling peal of thunder;
 Hark, hark, the horrid sound,
 Has raised up his head,
 As awaked from the dead,
And amazed he stares around:
Revenge, revenge, Timotheus cries,
 See the Furies arise,
 See the snakes that they rear,
 How they hiss in their hair,
And the sparkles that flash from their eyes:
 Behold; a ghastly band,
 Each a torch in hand;
These are Grecian ghosts, that in battle were
 slain,
 And unburied remain,
 Inglorious on the plain;
 Give the vengeance due,
 To the valiant crew;
Behold, how they toss their torches on high,
 How they point to the Persian abodes,
And glittering temples of the hostile gods:
 The princes applaud with a furious joy;

The King seized a flambeau with zeal to destroy;
Thais led the way,
To light him to his prey,
And like another Helen, fired another Troy."

In this passage, clamor, anger, war, pity, revenge, fury, hatred, piety, are portrayed in a few lines. Each one of the twelve poetic measures used in the English language is effectively introduced—onomatopoeia and kindred figures are employed,—and an infinite variety of musical change is required. The typical ideas demanded by the Pindaric ode are fully rendered. As for its poetic *technique*, the whole ode is simply perfect. But the *content* is a different matter. The general religious belief of Dryden's day was that a man's conduct did not matter, provided he agreed with the correct creed. So, about poetry the content made no difference, provided the technical construction was right. This is technically correct—but—the subject is a drunken orgy—followed by the destruction by fire of a beautiful captured city, Persopolis.

No wonder *Paradise Lost* was unappreciated in such an age.

Yet Dryden himself was friendly with Milton, when Milton was a proscribed man. And Dryden wrote these lines on Milton:

"Three poets in three distant ages born,
Greece, Italy and England did adorn;
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed,
The next in majesty, in both the last;
The force of nature could no farther go,
To make a third, she joined the other two."

But none can be further apart in form, subject, method, manner of treatment, than John Dryden and John Milton. Dryden was of the earth, earthy. He desired the favor of his King, and forgot about the favor of his God. Milton's poetry was in the pure region of holy thoughts, and lofty aspirations. Dryden did not write about nature, or the pleasures of study, or of friendship—as does Milton in the *Minor Poems*)—nor does he speak of celestial joys —(as do Milton's greater poems). Dryden writes about the city, about man, about his meanness, his petty squabbles, about rancorous enmities, about the vile deeds, and the unclean deeds, which transfigure life.

Morover the poetic forms he employed tended to hamper his muse. Classical forms restrained lofty imaginative flights—as the hope of earthly honor and preferment came between him and pure aspirations. Dryden was regarded as the greatest literary man of his period. Hence we understand why, in the latter part of the XVII century, the writings of John Milton were without power in England.

In 1688, twelve years before Dryden died there was born to an elderly couple, named Pope, engaged in the linen business, and living in Lombard Street, London, a puny, deformed boy.

Remarkably early he wrote passable verses,—and he had a wonderful passion for the society of those who made verse their profession. His father's means were ample. Because of feebleness, he could

not go to school, but he received a good education in the classics at home. At the age of twelve, escorted by a servant, he made his way to Will's Coffee House, to gaze from a distance upon John Dryden. This was the year Dryden died.

At the age of sixteen, this boy, Alexander Pope, was made supremely happy by an introduction to the dramatist, Wycherley. A strange friendship sprang up between these two, an almost elvish looking boy, and the large, handsome, elderly man, who disgraced the comic muse by his gross dramas.

Soon we find Alexander Pope altering and correcting Wycherley's dramas, at the latter's request.

All his life Pope sought, and was admitted into the society of the literary and the learned,—and so keen, so clever, so active, was his intellectual force, that wits and scholars were delighted by his presence among them.

Long before the end of his life of fifty-six years, this frail, peevish hunchback, was the chief authority, in London, on matters of taste in literature—the highest social and learned circles desired the honor of his acquaintance—and he ruled his kingdom with no uncertain hand.

Among his early friends was William Walsh, a Worcestershire squire, who had great admiration for classic forms, and who strongly urged upon Pope the value of "correctness," saying, "We have had some great poets, but never one that was 'correct.' "

This advice sank deep. Pope's one aim in writing seemed to be a continuous effort after "correctness." He succeeded in his aim. Form, formal

"correctness," is the mark of his works—and that of his followers, the "school" that imitated him. Classic formality, proper measures, exact lines, good rhymes, smooth pentameters,—sometimes ending in an Alexandrine—these were what he sought. To be formally "correct," according to classic models—that was to be a poet. As for emotion, or fancy, or imagination—these were actually forbidden.

At twenty he wrote a didactic poem, "*Essay on Criticism*." This was so "correct," the ideas were so neatly expressed, in such well balanced lines, suited to the popular notion of right style, that he received great praise. What "Mr. Pope" said and thought, was treated with respect, and he became the great authority in weighty concerns of literature.

Later he wrote the "*Essay on Man*,"—neat as the other—in rhymed couplets—pentameters—marked by polished regularity—saying nothing new—teaching no great truths—merely illustrating his own style and ideas of good composition.

The field in which Pope excelled was satire,—not that sort of satire which would reform the world by thrusts against sin or folly—but satire against personal foes, imagined or real.

Good poetry has been defined as "The most beautiful thoughts set forth in the most beautiful language, in accordance with the rules of meter." Now, satire is merely scolding—and didactic writing is intended to teach—and is best adapted to prose. Pope chiefly used these two forms,—so the

soul of true poetry is lacking, but—he pleased his age.

Everywhere we find in Pope's verse, neat couplets, iambic pentameters, finished and exact use of words, didactic and tiresome style,—but no new thoughts—and only as much real poetry as would be in the proverbs of Solomon, if arranged in well rhymed lines. Wordly wisdom, precept, maxim abounded—but no nature, no emotion, no fire, no enthusiasm, no imagination, nothing to lift the soul,—no poetry.

Restrained it was, and correct in form, lest by dreadful neglect there should be a syllable too much in a line,—but at the same time there was a careful and labored study, of how to most successfully stab an enemy to the heart, by the poisoned dagger of dainty, rhymed couplet. This was Pope's idea of poetry. Would that he could have learned Shakespeare's idea of poetry, or that he could have read Shelley and Wordsworth, on the aim and scope of poetry.

He said Shakespeare did not know how to write, or how to express ideas. Shakespeare's lines seldom rhymed—and alas! sometimes did not scan. So Pope re-wrote, revised, re-arranged Shakespeare, and gave to the world an edition of Shakespeare, a la Pope; at which some of the world covertly laughed—and then Pope in wrath wrote a satire—the *Dunciad*—or the *Downfall of the Dunces*, wherein he abused his critics by their names.

Pope desired to make a translation of Homer. As his own knowledge of Greek was uncertain, he em-

ployed Broome, and Fenton, and several other assistants to do the work. Occasionally he altered a word, or suggested a change of line. He published in installments, and by subscription, and he realized considerable money. *Pope's Homer* had success in his time, but many standard editions have set it aside since that day.

From Pope's writings, more perhaps, than from the works of most authors, we may take quotable lines or couplets. His lines often contain antithetic statements. Such work in couplets gives a choppy, detached effect. Hence he soon becomes tiresome. His lines resemble a string of cheap and glittering beads run together. He does not use words to build up a beautiful picture like Wordsworth, or a grand argument like Milton, or a lively conversation like Shakespeare,

"A little learning is a dangerous thing,

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."

"To err is human, to forgive divine."

"And so obliging that he ne'er obliged."

"Two principles in human nature reign,
Self love to urge, and reason to restrain."

"Order is Heaven's first law; and this confessed,
Some are, and must be greater than the rest."

"The learn'd is happy, nature to explore,
The fool is happy, that he knows no more."

"Know then this truth, enough for man to know,
Virtue alone is happiness below."

Examples might be multiplied, but the above show the sort of the poetry.

Pope was the model of his day, in poetry, for the first four and a half decades of the XVIII century. Queen Anne had taken the throne on the death of William III, and then came George I, in 1714, to be followed by George II, in 1727.

The age is called dull, unimaginative, brutal.

There was no system whatsoever for general or private education, and the ignorance of all classes was incredible. In 1685 a newspaper had been begun, but it was poorly patronized. Until Addison made *The Spectator* popular in 1712-13, there was no periodical that received much attention. Even then, the middle and lower classes took no interest in it. Richardson's first novel appeared in 1740. His material, it is said, he gathered in listening to the ladies of the beau monde, who came to him—a discreet, elderly bookseller—to have him write their love-letters, because they could not write themselves.

In that tale of Goldsmith—*The Vicar of Wakefield*—published in 1762—and extolled as a “delightful pastoral,” and as a “lovely idyll,” we find the Vicar vaunting his wife's attainments. “She can read almost any English book without much spelling.”

The women mentioned in these cases were women of rank and position. If such were their literary acquirements, how must the women of poorer rank have fared!

Under such conditions as these, noble aims, noble thoughts, grand sympathies, could not, did not thrive.

Some consider Swift's rendering of the *Yahoos* a coarse exaggeration, a transcription of the morbid grossness of his own mind. Yet the reader of carefully prepared history will discover that he was really representing what went on around him.

Fielding supposed he was depicting a brave and healthy character in *Tom Jones*. Probably Tom Jones was a typical young Englishman of the period. But we shrink in disgust at the portrayal.

Even John Milton did not regard education as necessary to women, though he planned out a fine Tractate for boys. But no one can rise much above the spirit of his age,—and Milton had died seventy years before Pope's death,—when ideas were even less advanced.

These being the moral environments of Pope's time, do we wonder that there were no masterpieces of poetry, and no real masters of poetry?

Chaucer and Spenser were mostly forgotten. Shakespeare was condemned as "Gothic," "Barbarous," "Incorrect," and Milton was a "Puritan" whom *nobody* could understand. Such authors were above and beyond the comprehension of the writers of the age, designated as "Augustan." It was very critical, very exacting as to the *way* a thing was said. *What* was said was of little importance.

And *now*—*we* say poor little Pope was not a poet at all—only a rhymers!!

In the period of time discussed the same ideas prevailed in religion as when Dryden was the master poet. "It is no matter what a person *does*, as

long as he *believes* what is right," was the watchword. Hence he could violate the whole Decalogue, if only his creed was correct.

Jonathan Swift—one of the foremost prose writers of the time, (who died in 1745), a year after Pope—had written as his first important work, "*The Battle of the Books*"—in which he maintained that no modern book was equal to the writings of the Greeks and Romans. These two nations had achieved such reputation, because they really wrote books. Prior to them, most of the written matter left by preceding nations consisted of lists of slain peoples and individuals, inscribed on stone slabs. The best books of the Greeks and Romans were epics. Epics are fiction—modern fiction, *we* call novels. Now, we consider a novel of good rank, when the events therein narrated, closely resemble what happens in real life—that is, seem probable.

The epics of Greece and Rome were concoctions of impossibilities. In Homer's *Ulysses*—the hero visits Sparta, where he finds Menelaus and his wife Helen, after her husband had returned with her from Troy. He describes her, as if she were a "Daughter of the gods, divinely fair, and most divinely tall"—he shows her fresh and young, say about sixteen years old. She had two brothers **born** at the time of her birth—and *they* went on the Argonautic expedition—so the years of her life were about one hundred and forty, at Ulysses' visit—an age which no one reached at that time—an utter impossibility.

Then again, the student of Virgil is so busied with difficulties of syntax, that he does not give heed to chronology. If he did, he would remember that Eneas left Troy at 1174 B. C.—and Dido founded Carthage about 850 B. C.—hence Eneas could not have been Dido's lover, suitor, husband—another impossibility—they never met. Eneas, having been born three hundred years before Dido, was denied acquaintance with her.

Strange to say, it was the peculiar system of religion of the Greeks and Romans that made them employ such folly in their epics, and prevented their consideration of natural beauty. Their religious beliefs made them fill the land and the water with minor dieties—beings mostly considered inimical to man—beings who resented intrusion into their haunts by the race of mortals—beings who treated such intrusion with dire vengeance.

The forests contained wild beasts—but mankind had learned to cope with that sort of creature—a creature that makes an open attack.

But the supernatural, the unseen beings, produced a terror that could not be overcome—even the bravest avoided, in their fear, the beautiful spots of the earth. So it is a most singular fact that the religion of these nations was the cause of a lack of nature poetry. They did not dare study nature from a deadly fear of interfering with unseen enemies, that could execute appalling vengeance if disturbed. Hence poetry among Greeks and Romans was about man and his doings, and not about

beauties of form and color. There were no botanists among them.

The literary lawgivers of the early XVIII century in England had imbibed the classical ideas of the French Academy. These classicists held that style should be regulated by a study of the ancient writers. No one had a good style who did not follow strict, narrow, classical methods. Horace, not Shakespeare, was the only model. Hence, the motto of Pope's "school" was "correctness," polished regularity. So painfully exacting was Pope about the form of his poems, that it is said he sometimes rewrote them many times, before the polish would suit him. Anything romantic, picturesque, or novel, was contrary to established canons of taste. Dull, didactic verse, and the invective of bitter satire, were the favorites, for they were regulated by classical rules.

The opening bud, the bird's song, the leafy forest, the purling stream, not being found in classical form, were avoided by the "Augustans" as unsuitable for poetry.

Hence John Milton was regarded as an effete writer of the past, one who had long since sunk into oblivion. His power as a leader, or master was, seemingly, forever at an end—and "correctness," classical formality, and stupid scurrility, reigned in his stead, and were called good poetry.

PART III

As the XVIII century crept on, lines less rigid in their adherence to classical form, and really containing emotion, beauty, and appeal to nature, began to appear—even before Pope died.

The first writers of this new cult were not pre-eminent for showing poetic ability, though they were men of no small amount of learning. The model of these men was John Milton. Among those who most successfully imitated his Minor Poems, were two brothers, Joseph and Thomas Warton. They were the sons of the Rev. Thomas Warton, (Vicar of Basingstoke, in Hants,) who had been Professor of Poetry at Oxford, 1718-1728. Joseph, the elder of the two, was trained at Oxford, and succeeded his father as Curate of Basingstoke. In 1740, when an undergraduate, aged eighteen, he wrote a blank verse poem, *The Enthusiast, or the Lover of Nature*."

In one place he uses the following lines:

"Happy the first of men, ere yet confined
To smoky cities: who in shelt'ring groves,
Warm caves, and deep sunk valleys, lived
and loved,
By cares unwounded."

Said Milton in *Il Penseroso*:

"Me goddess bring,

To arched walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown that Sylvan loves,
Of pine, or monumental oak,
Where the rude axe with heaved stroke,
Was never heard, the Nymphs to daunt."

Enthusiast:

"Yet let me choose some pine topped precipice,
Abrupt and shaggy, where a foamy stream,
tumbling roars."

Il Penseroso:

"Over some wide watered shore,
Swinging slow with sullen roar."

Enthusiast:

"With thy long leveled rule of streaming light."

This is line 340 of *Comus*.

In 1740, Joseph Warton published a small book of odes—to Fancy, Liberty, Health, Evening, etc. Many lines in each represent Miltonic ideas—octosyllabic in form—and in single words, phrases, and general mode of expression,—the methods of the author of *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* pervade the poems of Joseph Warton.

The young brother, Thomas, 1728-1790, was student at Oxford, then a fellow at Cambridge, then Professor of Poetry at Oxford, 1757-1767. He wrote a popular "History of English Poetry"—and in 1785 he was made Poet Laureate. He was so Miltonic in his methods of versification, that he hardly shows any originality. He was an intense Roman-

ticist. Joseph Warton had attacked Pope. Thomas defended Spenser, against Pope.

The Ode on the Approach of Summer, says:

“Haste thee Nymph, and hand in hand,
With thee lead a buxom band.”

L'Allegro:

“Haste thee Nymph and bring with thee,
Jest and youthful Jollity.”

Many similar resemblances repeatedly occur in Thomas Warton's poetry.

In his “Critical Essay,” Joseph Warton daringly attacked Pope, calling him the poet of reason—and that sort of poetry. This appeared in 1750. Here passion and nature are enduring. He placed Dryden and Pope in a lower rank than the neglected Shakespeare and Milton.

He declared that to regenerate poetry, the picturesque, the pathetic, the sublime, must be employed, as is done by Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton. He needed much courage to take such a stand in the era of Pope's popularity.

Thomas Warton was even more outspoken than Joseph, in setting up these earlier writers as the best models in poetry.

He revived the sonnet, which had been neglected by the “Augustans.” He wrote nine sonnets which are pronounced most excellent by the best judges of that sort of poetry. These appeared in 1750.

Here is one.

"Ah what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy banks with alders crowned,
And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
Beneath thy azure sky and golden sun,
Where first my Muse to lisp her notes begun;
While pensive Mem'ry traces back the round,
Which fills the varied interval between;
Much pleasure, more of sorrow marks the scene.
Sweet native stream, those skies and suns so pure,
No more return to cheer my evening road;
Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure,
Nor useless, all my vacant days have flowed,
From youth's gay dawn, to manhood's prime mature;
Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestowed."

This is called "A Sonnet to the River Luddon." Coleridge's sonnet "To the River Otter," and Wordsworth's sonnet "To the River Duddon," are supposed to have been suggested by this of Thomas Warton.

William Mason, 1725-1797, was the son of a clergyman, and was graduated from Cambridge in 1745, and became fellow in 1747. Later he became rector at Asten in Yorkshire, and afterwards Chaplain to the King. He opposed the war against the American Colonies, and he endeavored, with others, to obtain reforms in Parliament: later, the horrors of the French Revolution changed his views; and he ceased to be so radical. He was resident Canon of York for many years.

He wrote a monody on the death of Pope, in imitation of *Lycidas*.

Milton, in this poem, was "Thyrsis," Spenser was "Colin Clout," Chaucer was "Tityrus." "Thyrsis" spoke in blank verse, "Colin Clout" used Spenserian stanza, and "Thyrsis" archaic language.

In the same year, in Miltonic style, Mason produced two odes, *Il Bellicoso*, and *Il Pacifico*, representing War and Peace. The measure, much of the arrangement of the wording, the allusions to Greek poets, "the cloister," "the gloom," "the heaven-born strain," and other expressions, savor of *L'Allegro* and its companion ode.

Dodsley's Miscellany, in six volumes, appeared in 1745. The authors given above are freely quoted and there are also Odes and Elegies innumerable, on every conceivable subject, by other authors, known and unknown to fame. Odes to Fancy, Melancholy, Solitude, a Harp, Health, Autumn, Spring, Ambition, Night, Silence, an Owl, a Child of Six, a Young Lady, an Old Man, a Lark, a Thrush, Italy, Gratitude, the River Tiber,—all in imitation of Milton—and innumerable other Odes besides these—prove how his leadership was reviving.

The following is from "*Ode to Cupid on Valentine's Day*."

"Come, thou rosy, dimpled boy,
Source of every heart-felt joy,
Leave thy blissful bowers awhile,
Visit Britain's rocky shore," etc.

Also, from an "*Ode to Vacation*."

"Come sweet Goddess, full of play,
Ever unconfined and gay,

Bring the leisure hours with thee,
Leading on the Graces three," etc.

As the century progressed several writers better known began to imitate Milton's octo-syllabic lines—say, Parnell, Dyer, Gay, Tickell, and Ambrose Phillips.

The sonnet became popular, and Edwards, Stillingtonfleet, and others wrote fairly well in this line.

Blank verse, with decided Miltonic allusions and figures, began to appear. John Phillips' "Splendid Shilling," "Blenheim," and "Cyder" were of this order. The public ideas of poetry were very gradually altered from those of the arid period of Pope and his "School."

Joseph Addison, the great prose writer, made an imitation of some Miltonic forms. He devoted some space in the *Spectator* to the advocacy of Milton's poetry, setting forth Milton's supreme superiority.

John Dyer, (born in Wales) 1698-1758, produced in 1726, "*Grongar Hill*," or "*The Country Walk*." He could paint pictures with a brush, and he shows that he can also portray a landscape with his pen. Wide vistas, lofty castles, peasant huts, mountain streams, peaceful vales,—he sets forth these and more, having in mind the picturesque diversity of his native land.

From *Grongar Hill*:

"The pleasant seat, the ruined tower,
The naked rock, the shady bower,
The town and village, dome and farm,
Each give to each a double charm."

He wrote, in blank verse, another good poem, *The Fleece*.

“If verdant elder spreads
Her silver flowers, if humble daises yield
To yellow crowfoot, and luxurious grass,—
Gray shearing time approaches.”

In these two poems may be found all the methods of Milton's Minor Poems.

James Thomson, Kelso, Scotland, 1700-1748, was the son of a clergyman. His poem, *The Seasons*, appeared as a whole in 1737—in blank verse, filled with the beauty of nature—and all is Miltonic. He wrote a Spenserian poem, *The Castle of Indolence*, which had great vogue.

The description of Spring, in *The Seasons*, runs thus:

“From the moist meadow, to the withered hill,
Led by the breeze, the vivid verdure runs,
And swells and deepens to the pleased eye;
The hawthorn whitens; and the juicy groves
Put forth their buds, unfolding by degrees,
Till the whole leafy forest stands displayed,
In full luxuriance to the sighing gales;
And the deer rustle through the twining brake,
And the birds sing concealed. At once arrayed
In all the colors of the flushing year,
By nature's swift and secret working hand,
The garden grows and fills the liberal air,
With lavish fragrance.”

Here are ideas, not rhyming couplets. Here is original work, not imitation. Here are solid and

permanent qualities, and the author, as a colorist, has been likened to Rubens. His work became very popular, and translations and imitations of *The Seasons* were made by French and German writers.

Thomson depicted sea and sky, subjects hitherto neglected; but the fields, the heather, the trees, the birds, the flocks, the peasants, the domestic animals, the landscape, in whole or in part, all rural topics received his attention. He used iambic pentameter lines, interspersed moral ideas everywhere, as they were in *Lycidas* and *Comus*.

He is respected as a real poet of nature, emotion, imagination, and enthusiasm.

Let us quote from *Summer*.

“But yonder comes the powerful King of Day,
Rejoicing in the East. The lessening cloud,
The kindling azure and the mountain’s brow,
Illumed with fluid gold, his near approach—
Betoken glad.”

From *Autumn*:

“Where Autumn basks with purple fruit,
Appears the downy peach; the shining plum,
The ruddy fragrant nectarine; and dark,
Beneath his ample leaf, the luscious fig:
The vine here, too, lies curling tendril shoots,
Hangs out her clusters.”

Winter:

“And thus the snows arise; and foul and fierce,
All winter drives along the darkened air;
In his own loose revolving fields, the swain
Disastered stands; sees other hills ascend

Of unknown joyless brow: and other scenes,
Of horrid prospect shag the trackless plain,
Nor finds the river, nor the forest, hid
Beneath the formless wild."

Nearly all the writers here given were merely imitators, walking in the line of Milton. But they showed the awakening spirit which discerned between true poetry and mere rhyme.

Thomson is the first to show originality and ability to write about nature with continuous power. He paves the way for a line of more gifted writers.

William Collins comes first, 1722-1756. The melody of his verse and the beauty of his imagery make his readers wish he had lived longer. Though we discover his indebtedness to Milton, we see that he had imbibed a genuine Greek method, and his poetry has Greek beauty and grace.

Some think that his best poem was a posthumous publication, in 1788, "Ode on the Scottish Superstitions in the Highlands." It contained the folk lore of the people of that region. It is not so well known as many of his other Odes, and would not appeal to so large a class of readers.

An examination of some other Odes, will prove that he had absorbed the Miltonic spirit. One of his choicest is a beautiful "Ode to Evening." In the opening stanza he addresses "chaste eve," while Comus says "grey-headed even." He speaks of the "bright-haired sun whoses cloudy skirts o'erhang his wavy bed."

"O Nymph reserved,

Come pensive Nun"—after the manner of *Il Penseroso*.

Evening, stanzas 8, 9 and 10.

"Then let me rove some wild and healthy scene,
Or find some ruin midst its dreary dells,
Whose walls more awful nod,
By thy religious gleams.
Or if chill blustering winds or driving rain,
Prevent my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain side
Views wild and swelling floods.
And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy finger draw
The gradual dusky veil."

The whole poem is in the iambic measure of Milton, with his figures and ideas.

Take another Ode, most beautiful.

"In Memory of Those who Died for their Country in 1745"—(The Pretender's Invasion).

"How sleep the brave who sink to rest,
By all their country's wishes blest;
When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mold,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod,
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.
By fairy hands their knell is rung,
By forms unseen their dirge is sung;
There, Honor comes, a pilgrim gray,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay:
And freedom shall, a while, repair,
To dwell a weeping hermit there."

In all the range of English poetry there is hardly a more exquisite bit than this. It is the essence of love of liberty, and love of country. It is filled with melody, pathos, grandeur, simplicity, beautiful imagery, graceful ideas and expressions, and it is most compact in form. Spring comes to "deck," Honor to "bless" and freedom to "mourn" the martyrs to the cause of country and liberty—nothing is too good for these patriots. War, suffering, death, befel them here, but glory, life and immortality were their rewards,—and all this is summed up in twelve brief lines.

"Ode on the death of the Poet Thomson."

Stanzas 8 and 9.

"And see, the fairy valleys fade,
Dim night has veiled the solemn view;
Yet once again, dear parted shade,
Meek nature's child, again adieu.

The genial meads assigned to bless
Thy life, shall mourn thy early doom;
There, hinds and shepherd girls shall dress
With simple hands thy rural tomb."

From the Ode,

"Dirge in Cymbeline."

The breathing Spring, the poet says, is to be rifled of her soft and earliest blooms, and maids and village are to bring the fragrant plunder to fair Fidele's tomb. That place will never be visited by wailing winds or shrieking ghosts, but shepherd lads and

maids will meet there to tell their mutual love. No goblins or witches shall ever haunt the place, but gentle Fairies shall seek Fidele's last resting place to strew flowers.

The poem continues thus :

“The red-breast oft at evening hours,
Shall kindly lend his little aid,
With hoary moss and gathered flowers,
To deck the ground where thou are laid.

When howling winds and beating rain,
In tempests shake the sylvan cell,
Or, midst the chase, on every plain,
O'er thee, the tender thought shall dwell.

Each lonely scene shall thee restore,
For thee the tear be duly shed,
Belov'd till life can charm no more,
And mourned till pity's self be dead.”

Compare the above ideas with this passage from *Lycidas*.

“But, oh the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return,
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown
And all their echoes, mourn.”

Collins follows Milton, who made it apparent that all nature sympathized in his grief for the loss of his friend. So Collins takes nature into his confidence, makes her assist in the mournful service, makes her the partaker of his grief.

In his Odes, *To Pity, To Simplicity, To Peace, To Fear, To Mercy*, all written in an exquisite manner, there is the same Miltonic spirit in form and content.

In Collins we find originality, purity, grace, beauty, and real poetic fire. All these were his own—yet unconsciously, perhaps, he makes us think of Milton. He utters, in his letters, his admiration for the blind poet, and frankly acknowledges much indebtedness to him.

We have now reached Thomas Gray, 1716-1771, another poet of originality, not an imitator. As a classical scholar he ranks next to Milton himself. His list of poems is brief. No other poet has achieved so much fame with so short a repertoire. It is *quality*, not *quantity* that he gives.

His first important poem was "*Ode to the Distant Prospect of Eton College*"—then an "*Ode to Spring*," "*The Hymn to Adversity*"—and two having a Pindaric flavor,—the "*Progress of Poesy*," and "*The Bard*" all following Milton's ideas.

Let us consider another, "*The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*."

It contains thirty-two four line stanzas, iambic, pentameter measure. It represents a solitary poet loitering in a lonely country churchyard until twilight, and then, influenced by the time and place, giving utterance to his thoughts.

The poem became immediately an object of admiration and imitation. Translations were numerous. Also every budding English poet deemed it his duty or pleasure to write an "Elegy" on some topic.

But, in thus imitating Gray, they were following Milton. Gray's *Elegy* appeared in 1750. He had spent upon it seven years, rewriting, altering, revising, until it suited him. Some of the rejected stanzas are extant and we almost wish he had used them.

Let us consider this poem.

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day."

Il Penseroso.—the curfew "swinging slow with sullen roar."

"The plowman homewards plods his weary way."

L'Allegro.—"The plowman whistles blithe."

"Now fades the glimmering landscape from the sight."

Comus.—"Darkness spets her thickest gloom,
And makes one blot of all the air."

"The moping owl doth to the moon complain."

Comus.—"Fair moon,
Stoop thy pale visage."

"The breezy call of incense-breathing morn."

L'Allegro.—"Till the dappled dawn doth rise."

"The cock's shrill clarion—"

L'Allegro.—"While the cock with lively din."

"Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe hath broke."

L'Allegro.—"Whistle o'er the furrowed land."

"And waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

Il Penseroso.—"Dissolve me into ecstasies."

Then we have "the straw-built shed," "the echoing horn," "the smiling land," "solemn stillness." We look into the *Minor Poems* and find "clay habitations," "hounds and horn," "rouse the slumbering

morn," "the tanned haycock," "linked sweetness," and similar bucolic personifications.

Gray also refers to Ambition, Joy, Destiny, Boast of Heraldry, Pomp of Power, Beauty, Grandeur, Wealth, Knowledge, Science, Melancholy, and many like terms, as does the earlier poet.

So too, with transferred epithets. "Drowsy tinklings," "rude forefathers," "blazing hearth," "stubborn glebe," "animated bust," "living lyre," "noiseless tenor," "dumb forgetfulness," "fair Science," "trembling hope,"—this was also a method of Milton.

For example, we find in *Comus* "sainted seats," "ambrosial weeds," "nodding horror," "nice morn," "thievish night,"—and in *Arcades*—"thwarthed thunder," "warbling string,"—in *Lycidas*—"occasion dear," "melodious tear," "sultry horn," "sanguine flower,"—in *L'Allegro*—"brooding darkness," "slumbering morn," "secure delight,"—in *Il Penseroso*—"cypress lawn," "trim gardens," "Dragon yoke," "sceptered pall,"—and hosts of others.

Gray had much onomatopoeia.

"Plods his weary way"

"Beetle wheels his droning flight."

"Heaves the turf in many a moldering heap."

"Bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke."

"Pealing anthem swells the note of praise."

"Froze the genial current of their soul."

"Cool sequestered vale of life."

"Implores the passing tribute of a sigh."

"Warm precincts of the cheerful day."

'One longing, lingering look behind."

Hear Milton:

"Rank vapors of a sin-worn mold."

"Thick shelter of black shades"

"Gilded car of day."

"His glowing axle doth allay."

"Advice with scrupulous head."

"Makes one blot of all the air."

"Blind mazes of this tangled wood."

"The grim wolf with privy paw."

"Till the dappled dawn doth rise."

"Soothing the rugged brow of night."

"Entice the dewy feathered sleep."

If each stanza of the *Elegy* were to be studied, it would be found that every line is a little picture. Of no other poem in our language, can this be said. This shows how closely packed is the *Elegy* with ideas. Clever artists have published editions with dainty little marginal illustrations for each line.

The language is most simple, and is full of tender and pathetic expressions, as -

"Each in his narrow cell forever laid."

"The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

"Short and simple annals of the poor."

"Soothe the dull, cold ear of death."

The last seven words are so very expressive of the actual state of affairs, that hardly any other seven monosyllables could replace them.

"Some frail memorial still erected nigh." Not marble, not granite, or something colossal as in Shelley's *Ozymandias*,—but "frail"—a pitiful little word, that causes a tear:—and the rest of it.

“With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture
decked,

Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.”

And then, the rude inscription, “spelled by the unlettered Muse,” rouses sympathy for those deprived of their rights by “chill penury,” which kept the “page of knowledge” from their eyes. This was the sorrowful record of many lives.

But, at last, as even,

“The paths of glory lead but to the grave,”

they can “repose” in “trembling hope” upon

“The bosom of their Father,” and their “God.”

In thus briefly examining this Elegy, one of the finest productions of the English tongue, we observe the depiction everywhere of country scenes and life—of pathos and tenderness in referring to the poor and down-trodden—and in a manifestation in all parts of a deep religious feeling, which shows itself in kindly actions, not in more sentimental expressions.

Gray, like Milton, was a man of pure and attractive character. He appreciated the blind poet and wrote of him thus:

“Nor second he, that rode sublime

Upon the wings of ecstasy.

The secrets of the abyss to spy.

He passed the flaming bounds of place and time.

The living throne—the sapphire blaze,

Where angels tremble while they gaze,

He saw; but blasted with excess of light,

Closed his eyes in endless night.”

Many authors have been here enumerated. As the XVIII century progressed poetry improved—leaving behind the deadening effect of the Restoration, and succeeding reigns.

Some of the writers were imitators, without originality—yet they showed an appreciation of good poetry. The power so to do, is firstly, beautiful thoughts in the soul, and secondly the knowledge that content is more than form.

From the coarseness of the Restoration, when Dryden was the poetic leader, until the frigidity of the reign of Pope and the Augustans, we come to the last quarter of the XVIII century. Collins and Gray were real poets. They returned with scholarly tastes and pure aspirations to the methods of Milton, but they did not imitate him—they would have been what they were—real poets—had he not been born. Gray died in 1771, but the new movement continued. Poets and poetry awakened from the deadly destructiveness of the influence of Dryden and Pope—as Europe at last shook off the incubus of the Barbarians, who nearly blotted out its civilization, and gave instead the Dark Ages. So poetry—real poetry—began to return, and a host of good writers appeared—Akenside, Beattie, Goldsmith, Cowper, Campbell,—Burns, the child of nature—and Crabbe and Blake: not all of the highest ability, but all filled with poetic ideals.

As the XVIII century closes, and the XIX begins, we find arising a blaze of poetic glory—Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, Scott, Byron.

Tennyson, Browning,—and a host of lesser lights—all of whom openly acknowledged, and all of whom more or less, followed, the methods and the subjects of John Milton in his Minor Poems.

THE END

LIST OF BOOKS TO BE CONSULTED

- 1 Poems of Milton.
- 2 Life of Milton, Mark Pattison.
- 3 Essay on Milton, T. B. Macaulay.
- 4 Notes on Milton, Sir E. Brydgss.
- 5 Ward's Poets, Vol. II.
- 6 History of Romanticism in England, .. Beers.
- 7 Beginning of Romantic Movement, .. Phelps.
- 8 History of English Literature, Hallock.
- 9 History of English Literature, .. Cleveland.
- 10 History of English Literature,
Thomas Warton.
- 11 History World's best Literature, .. Vol. XVII.
- 12 Encyclopedia Britannica,
Articles on Milton, Dryden, Pope.
- 13 History of English Literature, . H. A. Taine.
- 14 Life of Addison, T. B. Macaulay.
- 15 Life of Dryden, G. E. Saintsbury.
- 16 Critical Essays. G. E. Saintsbury.
- 17 Life of Pope, Leslie Stephen.
- 18 Poems of Dryden.
- 19 Comic Poets of Restoration, . T. B. Macaulay.

- 20 Poems of Pope.
- 21 Battle of the Books, Jonathan Swift
- 22 Classical Dictionary Anthon
- 23 English in the XVIII Century, . Lecky, Vol. I.
- 24 Classical Essays, G. E. Saintsbury.
- 25 History of England, T. B. Macaulay.
- 26 Englische Studien, Vienna 1898.
- 27 World's Best Literature, Vol. VIII.
- 28 Life of Alexander Pope, ... Samuel Johnson.
- 29 Critical Essays, Matthew Arnold.
- 30 Ward's Poets, Vol. III.
- 31 Ward's Poets, Vol. IV.
- 32 Criticisms, Thomson and Dyer,
Edmund Gosse.
- 33 Collections of Poems, by Several Hands,
Robert Dodsley, Pub.
- 32 Poems of Collins.
- 35 Life of William Collins, M. A. Thomas.
- 36 Life of Thomas Gray, Edmund Gosse.
- 37 Poems of Gray.
- 38 Essays, Edw. Dowden
- 39 Accounts of Authors,
Encyclopedia Britannica, Ed. XI.



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